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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8897
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1920
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5398
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8991
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6567
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4394
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2383
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000239

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: REGIME ATTEMPTS TO PLACATE ROHINGYA WITH
DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN ADVANCE OF ELECTIONS

Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) On April 22, Rohingya sources in Rangoon told us that, over the last couple of months, a small group of Rohingya businessmen has joined the regime in initiating a number of community-development projects in northern Rakhine State in an attempt to placate the Rohingya community ahead of the 2010 elections. Our contacts speculate that the Rohingya involved are working with the government in order to expand their property and business interests. In addition, the contacts reported that a few of the group's leaders have "loudly" voiced interest in running in the elections to represent Rakhine State in the new Parliament. End summary.

Development for Votes

¶2. (C) On April 22, three Rohingya contacts told us that, over the last two months, some members of the Rangoon-based Rohingya community have established a group to implement community-development projects in northern Rakhine State (NRS). According to small businessmen U Myo Thant, U Sein Win, and Kyaw Soe Ag - who are critical of the effort - the group has raised 500 million kyat (about USD 500,000) for various projects, including repairing mosques, improving schools, and building water ponds. Of this sum, 300 million kyat was privately donated by Rohingya residing in Rangoon, primarily by wealthy businesspeople, and the rest was provided by the government. According to our contacts, those involved in the project have been granted unprecedented access to NRS, where the regime has severely restricted travel for nearly two decades.

¶3. (C) U Myo Thant and Kyaw Soe Ag asserted that this community- development effort is part of a government ploy to placate the Rohingya community in NRS in advance of the 2010 elections, as well as appease the international community which has become increasingly critical of the conditions and treatment of the Rohingya in NRS. U Myo Thant said the government similarly eased its stance toward the Rohingya before the 2008 constitutional referendum, even encouraging many Rohingyas to vote. U Myo Thant was skeptical that the assistance would convince anyone in NRS that the government has permanently changed its attitude toward the Rohingya.

Ambitions Abound

¶4. (C) The community-development group is led by an executive committee of about 10 Rohingyas, mainly well-connected businesspeople in Rangoon, according to U Myo Thant. Our contacts said they are quietly trying to convince the leaders of the group to disband. However, U Sein Win surmised that the community-development group's Rohingya leaders have become involved in the project to protect and expand their current property and business interests and build favor with the regime. Some also seem to have political ambitions and may seek election as Members of Parliament for Rakhine State. According to our sources, only a few of the group's leaders are "dreaming" of a seat in Parliament, but they have expressed their ambitions "loudly."

A History of Neglect

¶5. (SBU) Nearly 728,000 Rohingya live in NRS, about 85 percent of that region's population. They are predominantly Muslim. The government does not consider the Rohingya an official ethnic minority, alleging that they are "Bengali" interlopers from Bangladesh, and has denied them Burmese citizenship on that basis. As a consequence, the Rohingya in NRS face human-rights abuses, including restrictions on their movement, right to own property, and ability to marry. As has been well-publicized in recent months, many thousands of Rohingya attempt to flee NRS for greener pastures, often via risky boat journeys to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

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